

Carter the Unstoppable Sex Machine

by Bhargavi C. Mandava

Before you pass judgement on Carter the Unstoppable Sex Machine as being a pair of snot-nosed Brit brats, halt! Jim-Bob and Fruitbat may be doing 106 gigs with EMF across America, but they find trashing hotel rooms quite tedious and a waste of money. They have other things on their mind such as homelessness, peace, Charlie Brown, evil landlords and dropping bombs.

Carter USM, who formed about three-and-a-half years ago, is causing a stir among the college crowd in the U.K. with their second album, *30 Something* (Rough Trade). Chrysalis snatched them up and has recently released their first album, *101 Damnations* which opens with "Road to Domestos." The church choir sings sweetly and is suddenly axed with machine gun fire. The first single from *101 Damnations*, "Sheriff Fatman," is a regal, doom-laced track about a megalomaniac property developer. "It's just about people who have no morals and no scruples," says singer Jim-Bob.

Taking two extremes, Carter USM boxes your ears ever so gently with socio-political issues and enticing synths hammered with raging guitars. This is most evident in the final track, "G.I. Blues." Jim-Bob's voice is as smooth as velvet against tinkling keys as delicate as a music box. What's wrong with this picture? Jim-Bob's singing about bloody amputated limbs, that's what! Midway through the tune, his voice erupts as he spits out "John F. Kennedy, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Bob Hope, Uncle Sam," etc. In the end, it's more effective than the straight-on approach of Missing Foundation. When asked about this dichotomy, Jim-Bob responded, "We do that a lot. Even that's not necessarily deliberate. We like people to be moved by the music rather than just

getting into the groove...you know, people cry to some of the songs. I've always like music like that—a lot of slow songs."

Judging from a Carter set—replete with some of the best stage diving ever—crying seems to be far across the river. However, becoming sensitive to the environment and social predicaments is an important aspect of this duo's emotionally charged, intelligent music.

They both make it clear that they're not just jumping on the bandwagon. "It's not a deliberate thing," explains 30-year-old Jim-Bob. "We don't want to write about those things just to...make money out of other people's misery. If you live in London, it's difficult to ignore that kind of stuff. There's more and more of it now."

To balance the gloomy elegance of "G.I. Blues" and

"Good Grief Charlie Brown," there's the whiplash bedlam of "Midnight on the Murder Mile" that sounds like 999 meets The Clash, the gusty "Everytime a Churchbell Rings" and the funky spy music of the instrumental "Crimestoppers A'Go Go." Also tossed in are loads of references which typify American pop culture such as chicken takeaway (Kentucky Fried Chicken), sawed-off shotguns, "The taking of Peckham 123" (*The Taking of Pellham 1-2-3*), Elvis Presley and *The Waltons*, which Fruitbat assures is still on every Sunday in England.

By now, you're probably wondering where the "unstoppable sex machine" part fits in, right? "It's sort of subliminal," says Fruitbat with a smirk. "We've been told—and I don't know how—that we're a sexy band." Jim-Bob pipes in, "Subtly sexy in the same way as Woody Allen. Maybe that's what they mean." Whatever the case, Carter USM is sexy and finger-lickin' good.



Photo by Martin Strickland

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Ambrose Bierce, The Devil's Dictionary

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